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ABSTRACT

The master plan for California prekindergarten through university education is to create a coherent, coordinated policy to forge a connection between K-12 and higher education policies. A bipartisan group of 18 state senators examined current educational concerns. The report will be completed in March 2002 and be available for public review in May and June. This bulletin offers some key recommendations, describes what comes next in the process of creating a master plan, and explains how the public can participate. The suggestions are far-ranging. Universal preschool, full-day kindergarten, and dual-language learning are suggested for all public schools. Eliminating emergency permits for teachers is suggested, as well as differential wages to attract staff with career, technical, and scientific backgrounds. Clear and coordinated teacher education should link community colleges with the California State system. High school preparation for 4-year universities, community-college transfers, or vocational-certificate programs should eliminate any need for remedial courses. California high school exit exams and graduation portfolios should be required, along with other competencies. Integration of academics and career preparation should extend from the kindergarten through the university. An e-mail address and fax number are provided for public comments. (RKJ)

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April 2002

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Clarifying Complex Education Issues

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A Master Plan for California's K–16 Schools

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EDFACT

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Clarifying Complex Education Issues

Up for Public Review:

A Master Plan for California's K–16 Schools

Anyone who is concerned about California's public education system will have a chance to comment on a proposed Master Plan for Education that covers prekindergarten through university. The goal of this plan is to create a coherent, coordinated policy for the state's public schools, colleges, and universities and to forge a sorely needed connection between K–12 and higher education policies.

The work of creating such a plan fell on a bipartisan group of 18 state senators and assemblymembers who, in July 1999, formed the Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education—Kindergarten through University. The joint committee eventually created seven working groups: governance; finance and facilities; school readiness; professional personnel development; student learning; workforce preparation and business linkages; and emerging modes of delivery, certification, and planning.

The groups included research professionals, invited experts, graduate student interns, professionals working in education, and representatives of business, local government, and civic organizations. They examined research and best practices, and in March 2002 they finished presenting their final reports to the joint committee. A draft of the Master Plan—which will integrate these reports and feedback from joint committee members and the public hearings—is scheduled to be available for public review and comment in May and June.

EdSource has been following the work of this joint committee and has reported its progress in two previous EdFacts. This update offers a glimpse at some of the key recommendations, describes what comes next in the process of creating a Master Plan, and explains how the public can participate.

Working groups recommend an ambitious plan

The joint committee charged the working groups with developing recommendations around a broad scope of issues. (See the box on page 2.) Their more than 100 recommendations, if implemented, would dramatically change how California's children are educated from preschool through university and increase the public's financial commitment to its youngest generation.

To give a flavor of the issues examined, a sampling of the recommended approaches offered by each working group follows. It is important to note that some of these approaches may change through the process of staff analysis and public hearings, particularly if there is a need to reconcile differences within or among groups. The entire range of recommendations, including staff analyses, can be found at www.sen.ca.gov/masterplan/.

Governance

- ✓ Make the governor's office accountable for the education of K–12 students by eliminating the elected position of superintendent of public instruction and instead requiring the governor to appoint a chief state schools officer who would establish learning expectations, provide an accountability system, apportion resources, and serve as the director of the Department of Education. A minority report opposed this change, and a possible outcome could be different, complementary responsibilities for the elected superintendent and the governor's appointee.
- ✓ Require that State Board of Education members represent distinct geographical regions and limit their function to policy matters.
- ✓ Organize a state-level inquiry, independent of current existing agencies, to examine the role of county offices and regional entities. Although financial and academic oversight would likely be best at a regional rather than state level,

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The K–16 master plan working groups focus on critical issues

The seven working groups of the K–16 Master Plan Joint Committee were charged with developing recommendations around the following issues:

- ✔ **Governance:** Determine state and local relationships and authority for K–12 schools; define optimal school, district, and regional organization; and coordinate K–12 and higher education governance.
- ✔ **Finance and Facilities:** Consider "adequacy" funding models, revenue options, facilities planning, and postsecondary financial aid policies.
- ✔ **School Readiness:** Consider issues regarding early childhood education and other factors that affect school readiness.
- ✔ **Professional Personnel Development:** Examine teacher and administrator supply, preparation, and professional growth.
- ✔ **Student Learning:** Examine, among other things, what constitutes a high-quality education, factors that contribute to student success, alignment of assessments, and college and university admissions requirements.
- ✔ **Workforce Preparation and Business Linkages:** Define the educational needs of California's economy and examine career and technical education.
- ✔ **Emerging Modes of Delivery, Certification, and Planning:** Consider charter schools; home schooling; and adult, distance, and continuation education.

there is some question as to whether county offices of education, as configured, are the best entities to handle such oversight.

Finance and Facilities

- ✔ Develop an educational cost model to determine funding adequacy—the amount of money needed to fully support the educational goals of the state.
- ✔ Reduce district administrative costs and provide greater local flexibility by merging the vast majority of categorical aid programs (earmarked for special purposes) with general purpose funds, with three exceptions: (1) block grants based on the number of students with special needs, such as English language learners, pupils from low-income families, and those in Special Education; (2) additional funding based on district characteristics, such as rural transportation costs; and (3) time-limited grants to meet immediate but temporary district needs or to pilot and evaluate new state programs.
- ✔ To encourage more local control of school finances, allow districts to raise their own funds through sales, property, and parcel taxes that require 55% voter approval.
- ✔ Provide more financial stability for higher education through policies guaranteeing a "core" 4% increase each year for four-year universities; adopting a consistent fee policy; and establishing 10.93% as community colleges' share of Proposition 98's guaranteed revenues for K–14, the amount currently defined in statute but not reached in more than a decade.

School Readiness

- ✔ Phase-in publicly funded, universal preschool in a variety of settings and guarantee all low-income families access to subsidized, standards-based childcare services based on one statewide system with one set of standards.
- ✔ Require kindergarten for all children, eventually phasing in a full-day program.
- ✔ Phase-in required dual-language learning for all young children in public schools and preschool programs that receive public subsidies. The ultimate goal is to make every California child bilingual and biliterate, with progress evident by the end of third grade.

Professional Personnel Development

- ✔ Require that all teachers be adequately prepared before being assigned responsibility for a classroom. To that end, set a timetable (five to 10 years) to phase out the use of emergency permits for teachers and instead institute pre-intern programs.
- ✔ Establish and fund "career ladders" for exceptional teachers to keep them in the classroom.
- ✔ Require community colleges and the California State University System to establish a clear and coordinated teacher education program that will, for example, increase the number of teacher education units that can be transferred from community colleges to the Cal State system.

Student Learning

- ✔ Set ambitious learning goals that include mastery of oral and written expression in two languages, with one of them being English; acquisition of deep content knowledge; mathematical competency including algebraic thinking; and preparation for successful entry into four-year universities and community college transfer or vocational certificate programs without the need for remedial or developmental courses. To implement these learning goals, schools should offer algebra by eighth grade and make college readiness course work the standard high school curriculum. (Currently the "a-g course" curriculum required by the state's universities serves as a proxy for college readiness courses.)
- ✔ Without reducing standards, allow greater flexibility in teaching and content of college-prep courses so that all high school students can qualify for admission to four-year colleges.

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- ✔ Based on state content standards, create graduation standards that specify competencies students must demonstrate to earn a high school diploma and document those competencies through scores on the California High School Exit Exam and a graduation portfolio that is developed by the local school district. No single measure should be used to make high-stakes decisions about students.
- ✔ Introduce an Opportunity for Teaching and Learning (OTL) Index that will report schools' performance on standards for high-quality learning resources, conditions, and opportunities. These standards will specify what the state and school districts must provide all schools, in rich and poor neighborhoods alike, so students can meet state and local performance standards. This index will parallel the current Academic Performance Index (API) and will be used to assess the progress being made by low-performing schools in facilitating improved student achievement.

Workforce Preparation and Business Linkages

- ✔ Integrate academics and career preparation throughout K–16. For example, a study of the characters in Beowulf could lead to a discussion about different management styles found in the workplace; conversely, the physics principles of heat transfer, velocity, and friction could be taught in an auto mechanics course.
- ✔ Include age-appropriate career awareness across K–16 education. Put more emphasis on learning in the context of working life and acquiring workplace skills not covered in statewide tests.
- ✔ Provide improved professional development for teachers and counselors; allow differential pay to attract staff with career, technical, and scientific backgrounds; and increase resources for career guidance and assistance in schools. While high achievement for all [which is suggested by the Student Learning group] is a worthy goal, studies indicate that only about 20% of the workforce needs bachelor's degrees. Producing significantly more highly educated students than needed could result in a "profoundly unstable system" in the long run.

Emerging Modes of Delivery, Certification, and Planning

- ✔ Given increasing challenges, establish an adequate funding base for California's Adult Continuing Education system. (A subgroup recommended increasing funding on a per-pupil basis to match K–12 funding, but the rest of the group expressed concern that such an approach would reduce funding for K–12 education.)
- ✔ Ensure that all education segments—prekindergarten through University—have access to appropriate technology and that learners in rural and low-income areas are provided the same opportunities as those in suburban areas.
- ✔ Encourage innovative organizational forms, including charter schools that are assessed against the standards, and set aside a pool of funds to support the creation of small schools in K–12 education.

The joint committee seeks public input

The joint committee is holding public hearings and discussions of the Master Plan in May and June. The dates, time, and location of these hearings—as well as a copy of the draft plan—will be posted on the joint committee's website: www.sen.ca.gov/masterplan/. To encourage public involvement, the website also has an e-testimony function for those who cannot attend the public hearings but wish to comment.

An online dialogue will be created

In further outreach efforts, Information Renaissance (Info Ren), an impartial, nonprofit organization, will host a two-week-long moderated online dialogue about the draft Master Plan. Info Ren invites interested individuals throughout the state to participate in the two-week discussion scheduled for June 3–14. Members of the joint committee and working groups, along with representatives from the Governor's Office and the State Board of Education, are also being invited to join the panels of experts who will be a part of the dialogue.

Tentatively, the dialogue will examine the draft Master Plan using the topics covered by the seven working groups as a framework. Additional recommendations from the working groups will also be available for discussion. One focus will be the extent to which the Master Plan has the potential to create a cohesive system and assure that every student has success at every level of education. Discussion summaries will provide an overview of the main points covered each day.

To participate, register at the dialogue website beginning May 1 (www.network-democracy.org/camp). The website will include searchable copies of the working group reports, the Master Plan, and related documents. For more information about the dialogue, e-mail camp-info@network-democracy.org or phone the toll-free number 888/638-5323.

Those without Internet access can also participate

For those without Internet access, comments can be faxed to 916/445-4855. They can also be mailed to individual committee members (see box on page 4) or to: Legislative Office Building, 1020 N St., Room 560, Sacramento, CA 95814.

For questions about the plan or its development, the staff to the joint committee can be reached by phone at 916/324-4983 or by e-mail at Master.Plan@sen.ca.gov.

The Legislature will consider the final draft

A final draft of the Master Plan is expected to go to the joint committee on Aug. 1, 2002. The committee plans to adopt a final proposal by the end of August. If completed in time, this proposal would then be distributed to the Legislature

before the end of the 2002 legislative session on Sept. 15. Legislation needed to fully implement the final Master Plan is expected to be introduced in January 2003.

California needs a coherent vision

For almost two years, the Master Plan Joint Committee and its appointed working groups have been grappling with issues that have perplexed California educators and policymakers for decades. All those concerned about the future of public education in this state will have their chance to do the same by participating in the review of the joint committee's recommendations during the upcoming months.

After this process is completed, it will be up to the Legislature to finalize a much-needed plan that provides not only a long-standing, coherent vision for California's K–12 public schools but also a seamless system that supports the state's students from preschool through university.

Members of the K–16 Master Plan Joint Committee

To write to a senator or assemblymember, send your letter to the legislator at: State Capitol, Sacramento, CA 95814. E-mail addresses are available through the websites noted below.

State senators (www.sen.ca.gov):

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